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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 001423

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SUBJECT: DAS WYCOFF DISCUSSES REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES WITH  
DJIBOUTI'S PRESIDENT GUELLEH

CLASSIFIED BY: James C. Swan, Ambassador, U.S. Department of State,  
Executive Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY. On the same day that DAS Wycoff had separate meetings with Djibouti's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister (septels), President Guelleh engaged in a 90-minute exposition of the interlinking security challenges facing Djibouti. Chief security concerns for Djibouti are Eritrea's continued military occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira, as well as the threat posed by al-Shabaab extremists in Somalia. In addition to discussing developments in the Horn of Africa, Guelleh also underscored his concern over deteriorating security conditions in Yemen. He reported that Eritrea's Defense Minister had recently traveled to Tehran in search of additional military and financial support. He expressed reservations over Kenya's "Jubaland Initiative" to train ethnic Ogadeni in support of TFG political objectives in Lower Juba. Despite the wide array of regional security challenges -- or perhaps because of them -- Guelleh expressed his deep appreciation for Djibouti's strategic partnership with the United States. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** (U) On December 8, AF DAS Wycoff and Ambassador met with President Ismail Omar Guelleh. Embassy Nairobi Counselor for Somalia Affairs, AF/E senior desk officer for Somalia, and DCM (note-taker) accompanied DAS Wycoff.

**¶3.** (C) President Guelleh expressed appreciation for Djibouti's partnership with the United States, a relationship strengthened by "optimism" and transparency. He noted popular support within Djibouti for the U.S. military presence at Camp Lemonnier, citing civil affairs projects (supporting schools and health clinics) in rural areas as an excellent example of bilateral cooperation.

**¶4.** (C) President Guelleh noted the impact of regional instability on Djibouti. Individuals fleeing conflict in neighboring Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen could be found in Djibouti's modest hospitals, all receiving treatment with costs covered by the GODJ. Beginning in 1975, with the rise and subsequent fall of the Communist Dergue regime in Ethiopia, thousands of refugees fled to Djibouti, with many obtaining Djiboutian citizenship upon Djibouti's independence in 1977. In the 1980s, numerous Afars found refuge in Djibouti. More recently, for nearly the past two decades, the crisis in Somalia had impacted Djibouti.

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AL-SHABAAB REPRESENTS THREAT TO HORN OF AFRICA  
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¶5. (C) Unlike some European countries, the USG understood the gravity of the situation in Somalia and the need for action in response, Guelleh said. Speaking of the TFG's struggle against al-Shabaab, Guelleh said that the TFG and Djibouti sought to "eliminate a real cancer", which had to be stopped before it wrought havoc among the large mixed populations of Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia. Since the mid-1990s, extremist elements in Somalia, including al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (AIAI), had repeatedly sought to destabilize Ethiopia, but had been defeated - through direct Ethiopian military intervention in 1997, in the case of AIAI.

¶6. (C) Guelleh also reviewed deteriorating security conditions in Yemen, noting Saudi concern over developments with its neighbor, and attributing much of Yemen's current instability to the failure to demobilize and reintegrate former combatants from south Yemen in ¶1994. Somali mercenaries had also fought in Yemen in support of

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rebel groups, Guelleh said.

¶7. (C) DAS Wycoff noted the common interest of the USG in promoting stability in the region and in Somalia. He reviewed regional consultations on the margins of the recently concluded IGAD ministerial, and highlighted U.S. support for regional actors seeking to promote Somali stability, including support for Uganda as well as for Djibouti's efforts to train TFG troops. Wycoff highlighted bilateral cooperation with Djibouti, including the anticipated arrival in January 2010 of an ACOTA team to discuss possible Djibouti military contributions to multilateral peacekeeping operations, including AMISOM.

¶8. (C) In response, President Guelleh noted the necessity of establishing a security cordon in Mogadishu; TFG forces needed to "clean up" Mogadishu and to rid it of al-Shabaab forces, who rallied the bulk of their fighters to specific areas when needed. Civilians bore the brunt of their attacks, whether perpetuated by al-Shabaab or Hisbul Islam, and medical needs were urgent. A key reason to train TFG forces was that AMISOM could not remain in Somalia in perpetuity, Guelleh said, noting that TFG forces needed to replace AMISOM forces in the country's interior.

¶9. (C) After a brief discussion of USG opposition to a reported Kenyan plan to work with the TFG to train Somalis in Kenya for an intervention in Juba, Guelleh again highlighted the interlinkages among countries in the Horn, including Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. Kenya's Minister of Defense, like the terrorist Hassan al-Turki, were both ethnic Ogadeni, Guelleh noted. While the TFG and Kenyans wanted to play the Ogadeni card in support of the TFG, if mishandled the operation could backfire and lead to further unrest in Ogadeni regions of Ethiopian and northern Kenya.

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¶10. (C) Noting Eritrea's continued occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira, President Guelleh observed that Eritrea's defense minister had led an Eritrean delegation two weeks earlier to Tehran in search of weapons and financial support. Citing Iranian support for the GSE, Guelleh said the Eritrean regime continued to infiltrate Oromos and Afars from Eritrea into Djibouti, in an attempt to destabilize Djibouti. The current regime in Asmara needed to be removed, Guelleh said. DAS Wycoff pushed back on this idea, responding that the USG priority was regional stability and highlighting our significant efforts to exert diplomatic pressure on Eritrea.

¶11. (C) Guelleh criticized France for opposing international efforts to sanction Eritrea, noting that French officials sought not to irritate Isaias, due to the presence of a French hostage being held in Somalia. Guelleh noted that the recently concluded December 7-8 33rd IGAD Council of Ministers had resulted in a communique calling, *inter alia*, for sanctions against Eritrea, and that Isaias only responded to pressure. Guelleh attributed Isaias' intransigence to psychological problems, noting that an uncle of Isaias, as governor in Wollo, Ethiopia, had been responsible for repeated bloody repression of the population. Isaias had become more and more dangerous; Djiboutian troops had not left the border with Eritrea since mid-2008, Guelleh said. Wycoff noted that the USG was working to pass a UNSC resolution that would put sanctions

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on Eritrea both for its role in Somalia and for its conduct *vis a vis* Djibouti.

¶12. (C) COMMENT. In this 90-minute meeting with DAS Wycoff, President Guelleh offered a strategic tour d'horizon of the numerous security challenges affecting Djibouti, and how Djibouti therefore views regional cooperation as well as partnership with the United States as key to preserving its stability and security. Growing worries about instability in Yemen have now been added to standard Djiboutian security concerns over Somalia and Eritrea. In discussion of the deployment of Djiboutian forces to Somalia under AMISOM, Guelleh neither reiterated nor retracted this commitment. In a separate meeting, Djiboutian CHOD MG Fathi stated that Djiboutian troops had already been identified to serve with AMISOM but still lacked equipment (of which he promised to provide a list). END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) DAS Wycoff cleared this message.  
SWAN